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241358Z Aug 05

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 08 TEL AVIV 005227

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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Gaza and Northern West Bank Disengagement

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Key stories in the media:  
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Following the evacuation of the West Bank settlements of Homesh and Sa-Nur, which took place Tuesday without serious violence, all media summed up the implementation of the disengagement move: 25 settlements and 15,000 settlers were evacuated in six days. Globes reported that unexpected expenditures have raised the cost of the disengagement to USD 10 billion.

Ha'aretz, Jerusalem Post, and Israel Radio cited comments made by President Bush, who talked with reporters in Idaho on Tuesday. The media quoted President Bush as saying Tuesday: "I want to congratulate Prime Minister Sharon for having made a very tough decision." The President was also quoted as saying: "President Abbas has made a commitment to fight off the violence, because he understands a democracy can't exist with terrorist groups trying to take the law into their own hands." Bush added: "I understand that in order for [the road map] to go forward there must be confidence -- confidence that the Palestinian people will have in their own government to perform, confidence with the Israelis that they'll see a peaceful state emerging. And therefore it's very important for the world to stay focused on Gaza, and helping Gaza -- helping the Gaza economy get going, helping rebuild the settlements for Gaza -- for the people of Gaza." Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio reported that today, Vice PM and Finance Minister Ehud Olmert will discuss with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice the Israeli withdrawal, the continuation of the road map, and post-disengagement U.S. aid to Israel. Ha'aretz says that high-level U.S.-Israel talks on the assistance request are expected to last several months, as it can only be sent to Congress as part of a supplemental budget, which would be submitted in February at the earliest. Israel Radio reported that today, the U.S. Consul-General in Jerusalem will hand USD 50 million to PA Finance Minister Salam Fayed.

Leading media reported that on Tuesday, PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas called President Moshe Katsav to express his gratitude to Israel for withdrawing from the Gaza Strip. Abbas referred to the "brave steps" represented by the disengagement, and said the PA is trying to change the way that Palestinians think about the peace process with Israel. "Only through negotiations can we reach a reconciliation," Abbas reportedly told Katsav. Ha'aretz reported that Katsav called the recent developments "a historic opportunity for peace and reconciliation." This morning, Israel Radio quoted Abbas as saying that Israel has pledged to pull the IDF from the Gaza Strip by October 4. Leading media cited Palestinian dissatisfaction over the IDF's maintained presence in the northern West Bank. Leading media reported that many Palestinians derided

"artificial" scenes of settler anguish. However, Jerusalem Post cited praise of Sharon by a minority of Palestinians for "standing up to extremists."

Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli officials as saying Tuesday that disarming the Palestinian groups is a prerequisite to a diplomatic process.

Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio reported that, as part of the expected agreement on the positioning of Egyptian policemen along the Philadelphi route, Egypt has agreed not to provide weapons to the PA. Speaking on the station, Vice Premier Shimon Peres stated that the agreement does not contradict provisions in the 1979 Israel-Egypt peace treaty. Israel Radio reported that Abbas is in Cairo to discuss with President Hosni Mubarak the Israeli disengagement and the upcoming visit to Israel and the PA of Egypt's intelligence chief Omar Suleiman.

Yediot reported that the Quartet is considering arranging a Sharon-Abbas meeting during the UN General Assembly's meeting next month. The two leaders would discuss the "day after" disengagement.

Ha'aretz reported that the IDF and the Civil Administration in the territories began issuing land expropriation orders this weekend for construction of the separation fence around Ma'aleh Adumim, after A-G Menachem Mazuz gave the bulk of the route a legal seal of approval. The newspaper quoted diplomatic sources in Jerusalem as saying that those expropriation orders "are being carefully examined by the most senior officials in the U.S. administration" and that the issue is likely to be raised at today's Olmert-Rice meeting.

Ha'aretz reported that PalTrade, the Palestinian company in charge of running the greenhouses that the Palestinians will inherit from Gaza evacuees, recently signed its first export agreement for the produce slated to be grown there. The produce will be marketed via the Israeli firm Agrexco, which handles most of Israel's agricultural exports.

Yediot reported that the Iranian TV station Al-Aalam broadcast an interview with the Israeli Bedouin diplomat Ismail Khaldi, who explained Israel's demand that the PA dismantle the terrorist infrastructure.

Israel Radio reported that Republican and Democratic U.S. Members of Congress are demanding an investigation of the use of UN funds for pro-Palestinian propaganda on UNDP-sponsored banners in the Gaza Strip.

Ha'aretz reported that on Tuesday, Peres dismissed talk of his joining Sharon and Shinui party chairman Yosef (Tommy) Lapid in the next Knesset election.

Yediot reported that Amnesty International is demanding that Israel release five right-wing administrative detainees.

Maariv reported that the U.S. Embassy to Israel announced Tuesday that indefinite visas, whose validity had been reduced to ten years, are no longer valid. The newspaper also reported that, starting in January, new visas will be obtainable through the Embassy's Internet site. Maariv reported that Yossi Fattal, the head of the Israeli Travel Agents Association, met Tuesday with U.S. Consul-General in Tel Aviv Richard Beer. The two men reportedly agreed on a series of measures meant to accelerate the issuance of visas to travelers slated to leave for the U.S. in coming days.

Maariv printed the results of a TNS/Teleseker Polling Institute survey conducted last night:  
-"Now that the implementation of the disengagement plan is nearly over, do you support the disengagement plan or are you opposed?" Support: 56 percent; opposed: 35 percent.

Ha'aretz front-paged a Dialogue Institute poll conducted among Likud members over the past two days, which again illustrates that a deep rift has opened between Sharon and his voters:  
-In a face-off between Sharon and Binyamin Netanyahu, the latter gains the upper hand -- 47 percent versus 30.5 percent. Sharon versus Knesset Member Uzi Landau produces a 45 percent to 37 percent result in the latter's favor.  
-In a three-way race, Netanyahu wins the support of 26 percent of the Likud members; Landau gets the thumbs up from 24 percent; and Sharon remains around the 30 percent mark.

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## Gaza and Northern West Bank Disengagement:

### Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "The cumulative accounting shows that this was only the first evacuation, which will be followed by more."

Editor-in-Chief Amnon Dankner and senior columnist Dan Margalit wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv: "It is too early to assess the magnitude of the change that Israeli society has undergone in the eight days of the evacuation, but it is already clear that it has changed beyond recognition."

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote from the evacuated settlement of Sa-Nur on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Israeli governments have refrained in the past from evacuating illegal settlement outposts.... This ... was rendered invalid on Tuesday."

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote on page one of Yediot Aharonot: "The intelligence failure of the army in assessing the opposition of the barricaders in Homesh and Sa-Nur Tuesday was a great success for Israeli democracy."

Yahad-Meretz Party Chairman Yossi Beilin wrote in Yediot Aharonot: "The withdrawal from Gaza opens up a substantial opportunity to continue towards a much more dramatic move."

Uzi Arad, who was a senior advisor to former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, wrote in Yediot Aharonot: "Israel must put a stop to the present erosion in its positions; it must fulfill and leverage every component of the road map that serves its interests and must implement the understandings that it has reached over the years with the United States."

### Block Quotes:

#### I. "Post-Evacuation Balance Sheet"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (August 24): "The IDF will maintain a presence in the northern West Bank and will continue to fight terror, especially the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. But Israel must also work to improve the lives of the Palestinian population in the area between Nablus and Jenin. The Palestinians must feel a change following the evacuation of Ganim, Kadim, Homesh and Sa-Nur -- more freedom of movement between Palestinian communities and use of the evacuated area, even if Israel continues to have full responsibility for the area under its definition as Area C. The focus now moves to diplomatic and security relations between Israel, the Palestinian Authority and international parties, such as the U.S. and Egypt, and to attempts by the PA to govern evacuated Gaza and to jump-start its economy.... The cumulative accounting shows that this was only the first evacuation, which will be followed by more."

#### II. "The Eight Days That Changed Israel"

Editor-in-Chief Amnon Dankner and senior columnist Dan Margalit wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv (August 24): "It is too early to assess the magnitude of the change that Israeli society has undergone in the eight days of the evacuation, but it is already clear that it has changed beyond recognition. The myth that settlements cannot be evacuated without a bloody civil war has been shattered. The myth that Israelis are not capable of meticulous planning has been shattered. The keys were not inadvertently taken away by the absent-minded red-head [as in the story by the late Israeli satirist Ephraim Kishon]. They were in capable, wise and efficient hands. Israel proved to itself as a society that it is rock-solid. We got through a gigantic crisis with nothing more than a few scratches and bruises, and we can allow ourselves to heave an enormous sigh of relief. For, in spite of everything, we got through it unharmed and together."

#### III. "We Got Out Safely"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote from the evacuated settlement of Sa-Nur on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (August 24): "[The completion of the evacuation under the disengagement plan] was a very sad moment for anyone who holds sacred the settlements in the territories. For all others, it was a moment of relief.... Israeli governments have

refrained in the past from evacuating illegal settlement outposts on the grounds that the army and the police do not have the ability to complete the evacuation without bloodshed. This excuse was rendered invalid on Tuesday. Whatever [the government] wishes to evacuate can be evacuated. The question is whether Sharon wants to, and whether he is politically capable of it. The determination he displayed during disengagement had a profound effect on his image in the world and in Israel as well. Some see him as an intrepid leader, a winner, and others view him as a dictator without inhibitions. Sharon has won his place in Israeli history."

#### IV. "Failure of Intelligence -- Victory of Democracy"

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote on page one of Yediot Aharonot (August 24): "The intelligence failure of the army in assessing the opposition of the barricaders in Homesh and Sa-Nur Tuesday was a great success for Israeli democracy.... The IDF did not have intelligence dossiers about the evacuation opponents. This is a mark of honor for our security establishment. It proves, once again, that we live in a reasonable democracy.... Sa-Nur and Homesh, with the exception of a few isolated cases, were evacuated within half a day, after displaying reasonable resistance. In retrospect it can be said that the rabbis' activity for lowering the flames fell on fertile ground. In the day or two preceding the evacuation, there was a gloomy atmosphere among the barricaders. They were certain that they were the vanguard, and on the evacuation day there would be 20,000 people in Sa-Nur. This did not happen. The reinforcements did not arrive. This disappointment contributed to the inaction, the acceptance of the verdict, in the face of the courteous columns of soldiers and police officers who flooded every corner and every path in the settlements."

#### IV. "Elections Now"

Yahad-Meretz Party Chairman Yossi Beilin wrote in Yediot Aharonot (August 24): "The withdrawal from Gaza opens up a substantial opportunity to continue towards a much more dramatic move -- a peace agreement with the Palestinians on the basis of the 1967 borders, while annexing settlements close to the Green Line in return for a land swap.... It has been made clear that there is a Palestinian partner. [This partner is] problematic, difficult, weak, but interested in quiet and an agreement. The obvious step is to sit down with Abu Mazen and try to reach a final status arrangement with him. This will not happen. The election campaign has begun.... The Palestinians [also] stand before elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council in January.... The elections should be moved up in order to shorten the period of political stalemate as much as possible.... In [the Israeli] elections, the peace camp will have to present its real alternative ... negotiations aimed at peace and ending the conflict.... It will be faced by the Right, which has split into two camps: one camp that will speak about perpetuating the current situation.... The other camp will offer small unilateral withdrawals.... The people will be called upon to choose, and the sooner the better."

#### VI. "Leverage the Road Map"

Uzi Arad, who was a senior advisor to former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, wrote in Yediot Aharonot (August 24): "Israel must put a stop to the present erosion in its positions; it must fulfill and leverage every component of the road map that serves its interests and must implement the understandings that it has reached over the years with the United States. In any case, the consecutive stages of the road map must not be watered down, and certainly not skipped over, particularly an immediate Palestinian frontal confrontation with the terror organizations, as they have undertaken to do. The Quartet members must also adhere to the road map and the necessity to dismantle the terror organizations. Only then will Israel be able to negotiate with the Palestinians without being under violence and fire. Waiving this will lead to a Palestinian escalation and ultimately an armed and hostile Palestinian state will arise. The Palestinians do not wish for a state within provisional borders, as enabled by the second stage of the road map. This does not mean that Israel will give up what it is entitled to -- normalization on the part of the Arab states and regional cooperation initiatives. Only within the framework of demanding negotiations, based on Binyamin Netanyahu's policy of reciprocity, will Israel be able to reach arrangements that will meet our security interests. But for this purpose a reversal is required: no more should leniency and appeasement be

practiced outwardly and determination be shown inwardly; Israel should demonstrate firmness and determination outwardly and reconciliation at home."

KURTZER